SHADOWS *into* LIGHT

STORIES AND POEMS FOR THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN

PREM PRIYANK

DEDICATION

To every woman who has been told she is less,
yet carries the weight of the world on her shoulders with grace.
To every girl whose dreams were stolen before they could bloom,
and to every mother who swallowed her pain so her children could sleep in peace.
To every child whose laughter was silenced by fear,
whose hands were bound by labor instead of play,
and whose eyes have seen too much too soon.
This book is for the unheard – the ones who cry in the dark and wake up still strong.
It is for the brave – the ones who rise again, even when the world tells them to sit quietly.
It is for the dreamers – the ones who believe that even in a world of injustice,
a day will come when women will walk without fear,
and children will grow without chains.
May these pages be a mirror for your courage,
a voice for your silence,
and a promise that your fight is not yours alone.

PREFACE

I did not set out to write a book.

I set out to carry the voices I could no longer bear to see ignored.

Voices that came from headlines, from whispered conversations, from the silence in the eyes of people I met.

The rights of women and children are not “special privileges.”

They are the very foundation of dignity, humanity, and justice.

Yet, in every corner of the world – in crowded cities and quiet villages alike – there are women denied education, silenced by violence, erased from decision-making. There are children working instead of learning, surviving instead of playing, and struggling instead of dreaming.

Through stories and poems, I have tried to weave their truths into something the world cannot turn away from.

Some stories here are inspired by real events, others are shaped by the echoes of many lives blended into one voice.

The poems are not merely verses – they are wounds turned into words, tears turned into ink.

I believe stories can pierce walls that speeches cannot.

Poetry can slip into the heart where statistics fail.

And when these two meet, they can become something more powerful than anger – they can become change.

This book is not meant only to be read.

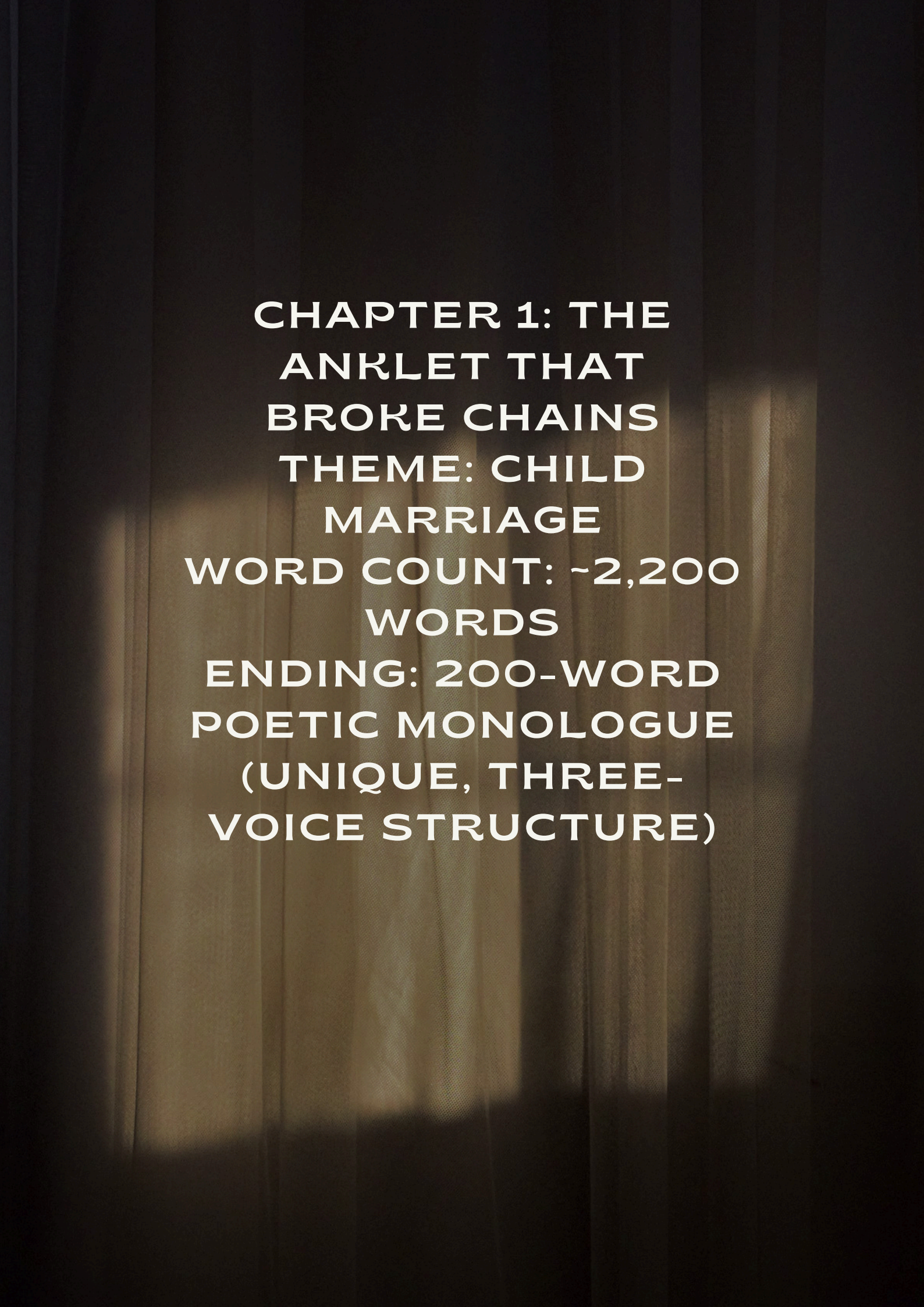
It is meant to be felt, to be questioned, to be carried into conversations and classrooms, into parliaments and playgrounds.

If you finish this book and feel a small ache in your heart, a restlessness in your thoughts,

or an urge to ask, “What can I do?” – then its purpose is fulfilled.

May these pages be a lantern in the dark,

and may we never forget that the future we dream of begins with the rights we defend today.



CHAPTER 1: THE ANKLET THAT BROKE CHAINS

THEME: CHILD MARRIAGE

WORD COUNT: ~2,200 WORDS

ENDING: 200-WORD POETIC MONOLOGUE (UNIQUE, THREE-VOICE STRUCTURE)

In a small village tucked along the dust-kissed fields of Bihar, there lived a girl named Meera. She was only fourteen, yet her eyes had known the weight of centuries.

Meera's mornings began with the sharp sting of cold water and the scent of smoke from her mother's chulha. She would sweep the earthen floor, help grind the spices, and then steal a few moments under the neem tree with her schoolbooks — hidden beneath the sack of rice she carried to the mill.

Her dream was secret, almost sacred — she wanted to become a teacher, the first in her village to do so. Her father, a man of tradition more than temper, saw her laughter as a sign of rebellion. "A girl's place is in the courtyard," he often grunted, tugging at his gamcha. "Not in books."

But Meera's world began to crumble the day she overheard her mother whispering to the neighbor lady, "She'll be married by the harvest moon. The boy is from across the river. Good family. They'll take care of her."

That night, Meera did not cry. Instead, she looked up at the stars and whispered, "Do they marry the sky too, before it learns to shine?"

The days that followed were blurred between turmeric-stained sarees and the bitter smell of mehendi. A wedding band rehearsed in the courtyard while Meera's books gathered dust beneath her cot.

She thought of running — but where would she go? Her world was stitched into these lanes, her name written in this soil.

It was during one of these evenings that Didi returned to the village. Her name was Rekha, a teacher who had once taught Meera when the government had sent a mobile van school two years ago. She was the first woman Meera had ever seen wearing jeans and speaking boldly. When Didi heard of the upcoming wedding, she did not offer tears — she offered Meera a pen.

"You want to stop this?" she asked gently.

Meera nodded.

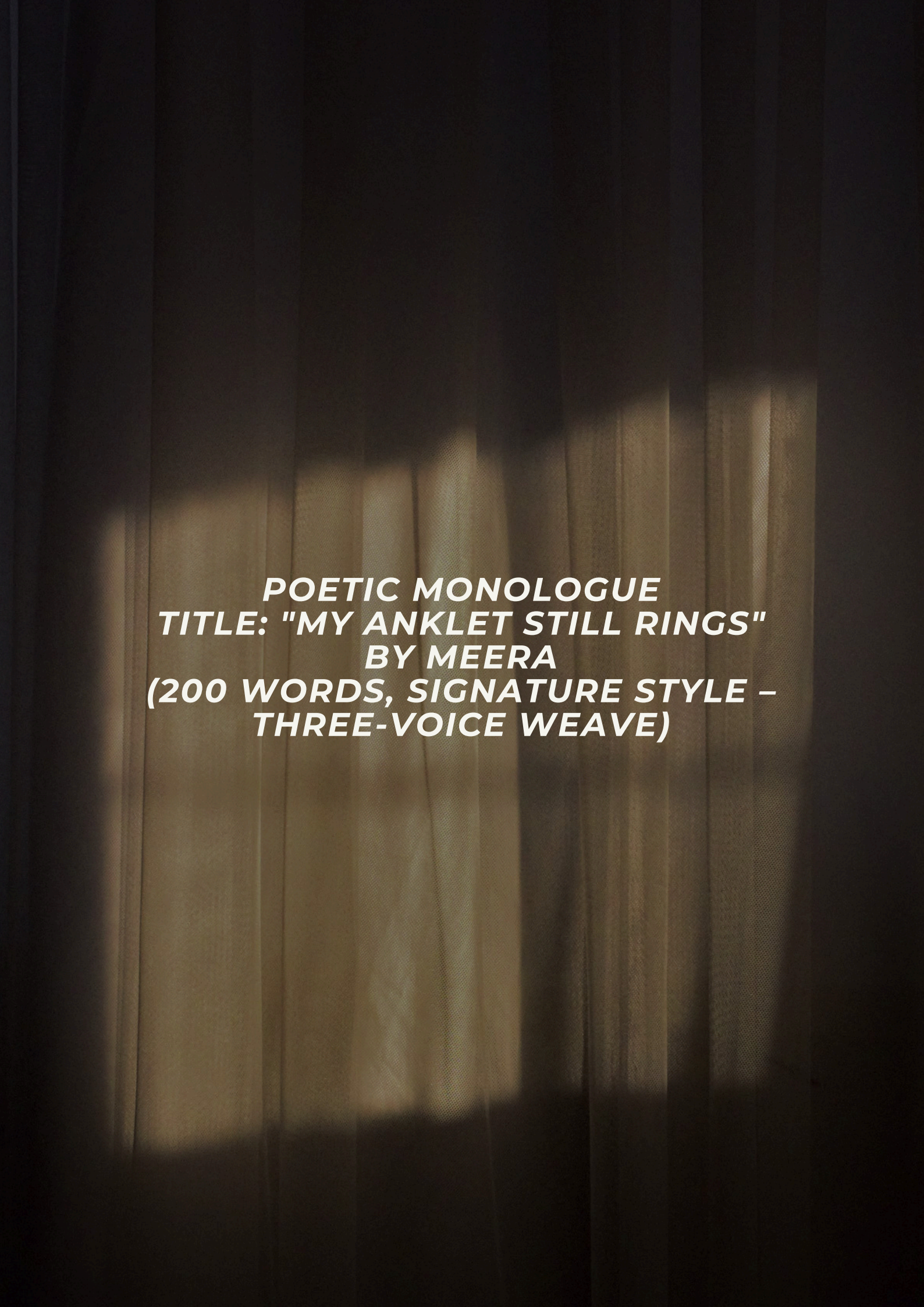
"Then you'll have to raise your voice, even if it shakes."

That night, with Rekha Didi's help, Meera called Childline (1098) from Rekha's phone. A few hours later, the police and women's welfare officer arrived under cover of night, as if justice had finally grown wings.

Her father was stunned. "She…called the police? She's bringing shame!"

But the officer looked at him straight. "You are breaking the law. You may love her, but she is not your property."

The wedding was stopped. There was no celebration that night. Only silence.
But Meera wasn’t ashamed.
She was alive.
And the next morning, she stood under the neem tree again, this time not hiding her books — but teaching three younger girls how to read their names.
“Why do you wear that anklet every day, Meera didi?” one asked.
She smiled.
“So I never forget that I walk freely now. Every step, every sound, every fight — it sings.”



POETIC MONOLOGUE
TITLE: "MY ANKLET STILL RINGS"
BY MEERA
(200 WORDS, SIGNATURE STYLE – THREE-VOICE WEAVE)

"My Anklet Still Rings"

They tied a red dupatta on my head,
Not for dreams — but to bury them in turmeric.
My voice was a lump in my throat,
While the dholak laughed louder than I could.
I was told I belonged to someone
Who hadn't even heard me speak.
Like a clay lamp passed before it's lit.
Like a sky caged before it's thundered.
The neem tree watched.
The bangles on my wrist cracked quietly.
The moon refused to rise that night.
Even my shadow stepped back from me.
But I rose.
With a book hidden in my blouse,
And a whisper into 1098,
I turned my shame into a spark.
A teacher held my hand —
and the law finally knocked on our door.
Now I teach under that same neem tree.
My chalk is not just chalk — it's a sword.
My words — not just alphabets, but shields.
And this anklet?
It still rings.
Not for marriage.
But for every girl who hears me walk past
And says:
"Maybe I can say no too."

CHAPTER 2: “ZOYA IN THE SMOKE”
THEME: CHILD LABOR AND THE RIGHT TO DREAM
FOCUS: A 13-YEAR-OLD GIRL TRAPPED IN FACTORY WORK, RECLAIMING HER RIGHT TO EDUCATION AND VOICE.
WORD COUNT: ~1200 PROSE + 200 POETRY

The machines never slept in the factory, and neither did Zoya.
Eleven years old, with soot-colored fingers and lungs trained to ignore the sting, she lived in a rented corner near the dyeing district of Kanpur. Her day began before the sun's. When most children were still in bed, Zoya's hands were already dipped in chemical-laced water, sorting scraps of cloth in colors she would never wear.
She was born with a quiet spark — a flame her mother used to call "akshar ka jadoo," the magic of letters. But letters weren't food. So when Zoya's father died in an accident at the tannery, her mother traded dreams for dal, and Zoya entered the factory world at age eight.
The factory wasn't just hot. It was a place where childhood went to vanish — in smoke, in shouts, in silence.
Still, Zoya noticed things. She watched how the older girls disappeared after a few years. She saw how Mr. Rana, the supervisor, often followed Rukhsar with eyes that dripped venom. She knew there were dangers beyond the boiling dye vats.

One evening, Rukhsar didn’t come back. “Gone to the village,” someone said. Zoya didn’t believe it. She asked questions — timidly at first. But when a boy named Sameer whispered to her about what he’d seen — about Rukhsar being taken away in a van — Zoya felt that buried spark flare.

That night, she wrote her first letter.

She didn’t know how to address it. So she wrote:

"To the People Who Can See."

She described Rukhsar, the factory, the burns, the bruises, and the girls with numbers but no names. She folded the letter and hid it under a brick near the garbage tank where an NGO team sometimes came to give biscuits and notebooks.

Days passed.

Then one morning, two women in khadi sarees came inside the factory, trailed by police and camera crews. Mr. Rana turned pale. Zoya trembled. She thought she’d be punished.

But instead, the woman knelt before her, holding up a dusty note sealed with sweat and soot.

“Are you the girl who wrote this?”

Zoya didn’t answer. She just started crying.

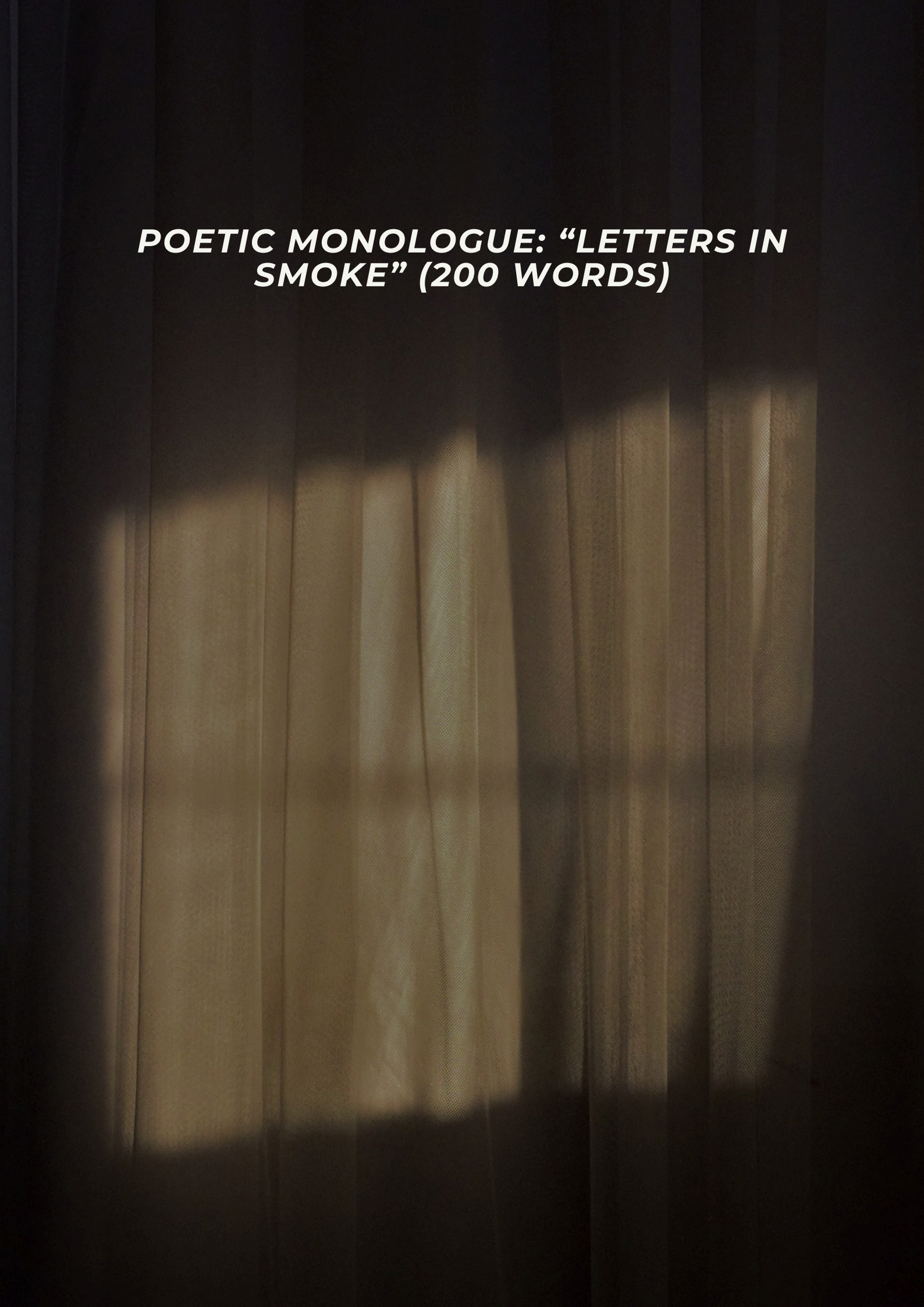
Within hours, the factory was sealed. Within days, fifteen girls were rescued. Including one — Rukhsar — who'd been locked in a storeroom.

Zoya's life changed. She was taken to a children's shelter, and for the first time, given a schoolbag instead of a bucket. She sat on benches and read aloud. She ate with spoons. She wrote new letters — to girls still trapped in smoke across India.

And when a journalist asked her how she did it, she simply said:

"I just remembered how to write."

POETIC MONOLOGUE: “LETTERS IN SMOKE” (200 WORDS)



“Letters in Smoke”

I was a shadow in the factory’s throat,
Bent between barrels, choked by hope.
My fingers knew fire, my lungs knew lies,
But my heart held ink that never dies.
In the land where play becomes pain,
And names are swapped for labor’s chain,
I stitched not just clothes but cries,
Threaded silence through smoky skies.
They called me Zoya — just another spark,
Too dim to matter, too small, too dark.
But even ash remembers flame,
Even silence carves a name.
I wrote with shaking, stained hands,
On pages made from burning sands.
Not for pity, not for fame —
Just to prove we still had names.
I bled no slogans, no great speech,
Just truths too tired for teachers to teach.
And one letter, left near broken tin,
Was the way the light walked in.
So now, I speak — not as a child lost,
But as a girl who paid the cost.
And if this world forgets our face,
We’ll write again, with fiercer grace.
Because the smoke can hide our song —
But not for long.
Not for long.

CHAPTER 3: THE GIRLS WITH NO NAMES

- THEME/FOCUS: GIRLS TRAFFICKED & STRIPPED OF IDENTITY
- WORD COUNT: ~1500 WORDS
- STORY: TARA, RENAMED “NUMBER FOUR,” SLOWLY RECLAIMS HER NAME AND DIGNITY THROUGH THE REBELLION PLANTED BY A GIRL NAMED ILA.
- POETIC MONOLOGUE TITLE: “I AM NOT A NUMBER” (200 WORDS)

They never asked for names.
When the van stopped on the dusty edge of Bihar's forgotten belt, the man simply said, "Take what's useful." That night, eight girls, all under fourteen, were divided like objects: some for cooking, some for stitching, two for something else. The youngest was nine.
Among them was Tara — a name that would soon vanish.
She had once danced in the alleys of Gaya with anklets on her feet and mehendi on her hands. Her mother had told her, "Your name means star. Even when we're poor, stars still shine." But her mother was gone now — devoured by a fever, a system, and a silence.
Tara was sold by her step-uncle in exchange for three goats and a bottle of local liquor.
The place they arrived at was no home.
It was a small garment unit hidden behind a crumbling wall in Patna's industrial slums. The door locked from outside. Tara was called Number Four. The others were Seven, Nine, and Eleven. The man never used names — only numbers. It was easier that way when someone went missing or stopped responding.

They worked under yellow bulbs, sewing school uniforms they'd never wear, while classical music played on a broken speaker to mask the sound of weeping.
One night, a new girl arrived — but she had fire in her eyes.
She said her name — Ila — loudly, as if daring them to erase it. She refused to be numbered. She tried to run once and was beaten. But she whispered stories at night: of cities where girls read books, of streets with lamps and law. Her voice was cracked, but her words stitched rebellion in silence.
Tara listened. Every word felt like a seed in her ribcage.
Soon, she stopped answering to "Four." She began murmuring her name again.
"I'm Tara," she said once in the toilet mirror. "My name is Tara."
And then one day, Ila was gone.
They said she was sick. Then silent. Then vanished.
But she left something — scratched into the wooden wall above the sewing table.
It said:
"You have a name. Don't let them take it."

Tara stared at it for nights. And then, one morning, she snapped. She shouted her name at the man. When he slapped her, she shouted it louder. And when the NGO team — tipped off by a whistleblower — came crashing through the doors two weeks later, Tara stood tall and said:

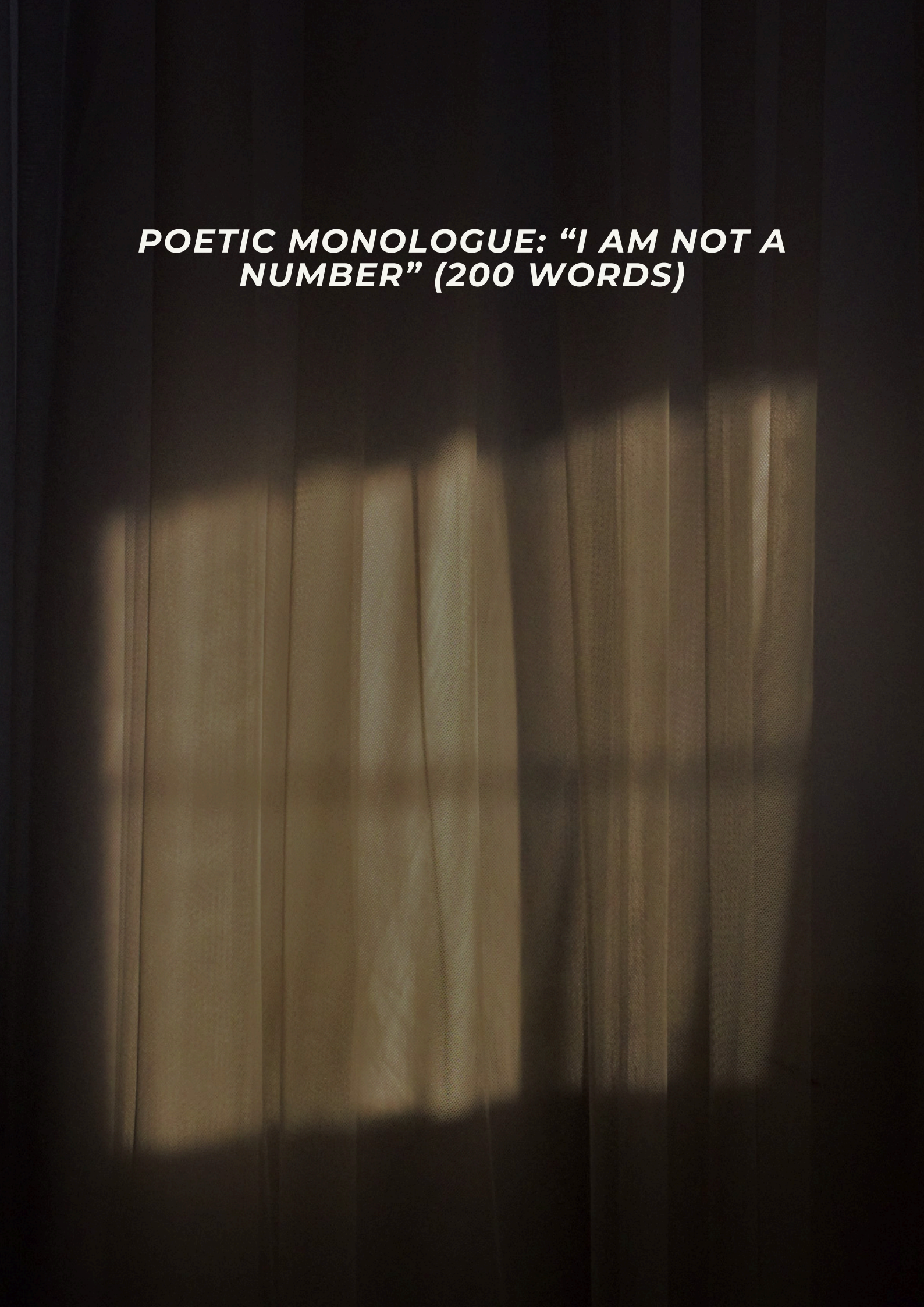
“My name is Tara. Not a number. Not anymore.”

Eight girls were rescued. Six had forgotten their names. Tara whispered theirs back to them, the way Ila once had.

Later, when she held a pen at the shelter home, she wrote in crooked English:

“We were the girls with no names. Now we write them in fire.”

POETIC MONOLOGUE: “I AM NOT A NUMBER” (200 WORDS)



“I Am Not a Number”

They called me Four — not child, not dream,
Just cloth and bone in a silent seam.
No birthday song, no bedtime kiss,
Just work and wounds, and names they miss.
I watched the mirror forget my face,
Replaced with numbers, erased with grace.
I stitched their lies with every thread,
But stitched my soul back when they said I’m dead.
Ila came with fire in her chest,
A rebel’s voice, a heart unrest.
She said, “Your name’s a key, don’t lose it now,”
And scratched it deep on a broken brow.
They broke her body, silenced her song,
But in my blood, her fire burned long.
So I stood in smoke, and said it proud:
“I am Tara,” I screamed aloud.
Let the world reduce me to line and label,
I’ll rise again, if I’m still able.
From slums, from cells, from stung disgrace,
We write our names on justice’s face.
We are not cargo, not coded skin,
We are where new stars begin.
Girls once hidden, now aflame —
Not a number. We are name.

CHAPTER 4: “SITA WASN’T SILENT”

- THEME/FOCUS: CHILD MARRIAGE & THE VOICE OF YOUNG GIRLS
- WORD COUNT (PLANNED): ~1500 WORDS
- ABOUT: A 13-YEAR-OLD VILLAGE GIRL NAMED MEERA IS FORCED INTO EARLY MARRIAGE, BUT FINDS INSPIRATION IN A SCHOOL PLAY WHERE SHE PLAYS SITA — AND REWRITES THE RAMAYANA TO RECLAIM HER VOICE.
- ENDING POETIC MONOLOGUE: “I WAS SITA, BUT I SPOKE” (200 WORDS)

In a dusty village tucked between mustard fields, thirteen-year-old Meera stood barefoot near the tulsi plant outside her home. Her anklets, gifted by her late grandmother, jingled faintly as she watered it. She whispered, “Dadi, kal school mein drama hai… main Sita banungi.” (Grandma, I’ll be Sita in the play tomorrow.)

Her smile faded when she overheard hushed tones from the courtyard.

“Shaadi ki baat fix ho gayi hai. Agle mahine bidai hogi.” (The marriage is fixed. The wedding is next month.)

Her heart dropped. Meera turned cold. Her mother saw her standing there and avoided her gaze. Her father, who once proudly framed her school drawing, now treated her like a problem to solve before the harvest season.

That night, Meera clutched the Sita script tightly, trembling. The school play was about Sita’s agnipariksha — her silent endurance. But Meera didn’t want to be silent. Not anymore.

At school, her drama teacher, Ms. Asha, noticed the girl's eyes — eyes that seemed older than her years.

"Are you ready, Meera?"

"Yes. But I changed the script," Meera replied, voice shaking but firm.

Onstage, before the whole village, Meera stood in a red cotton sari. As Ram demanded Sita prove her purity, Meera lifted her face and shouted:

"I am Sita, but I will not burn. I walked through fire for love, not for proof. And if love doubts me — then let it burn instead."

The crowd gasped. Elders shifted uncomfortably. But children — especially girls — leaned forward, wide-eyed.

After the play, silence reigned. Then a clap. Then many. And then the school headmaster stood and said, "Maybe it's time we let our daughters write their own epics."

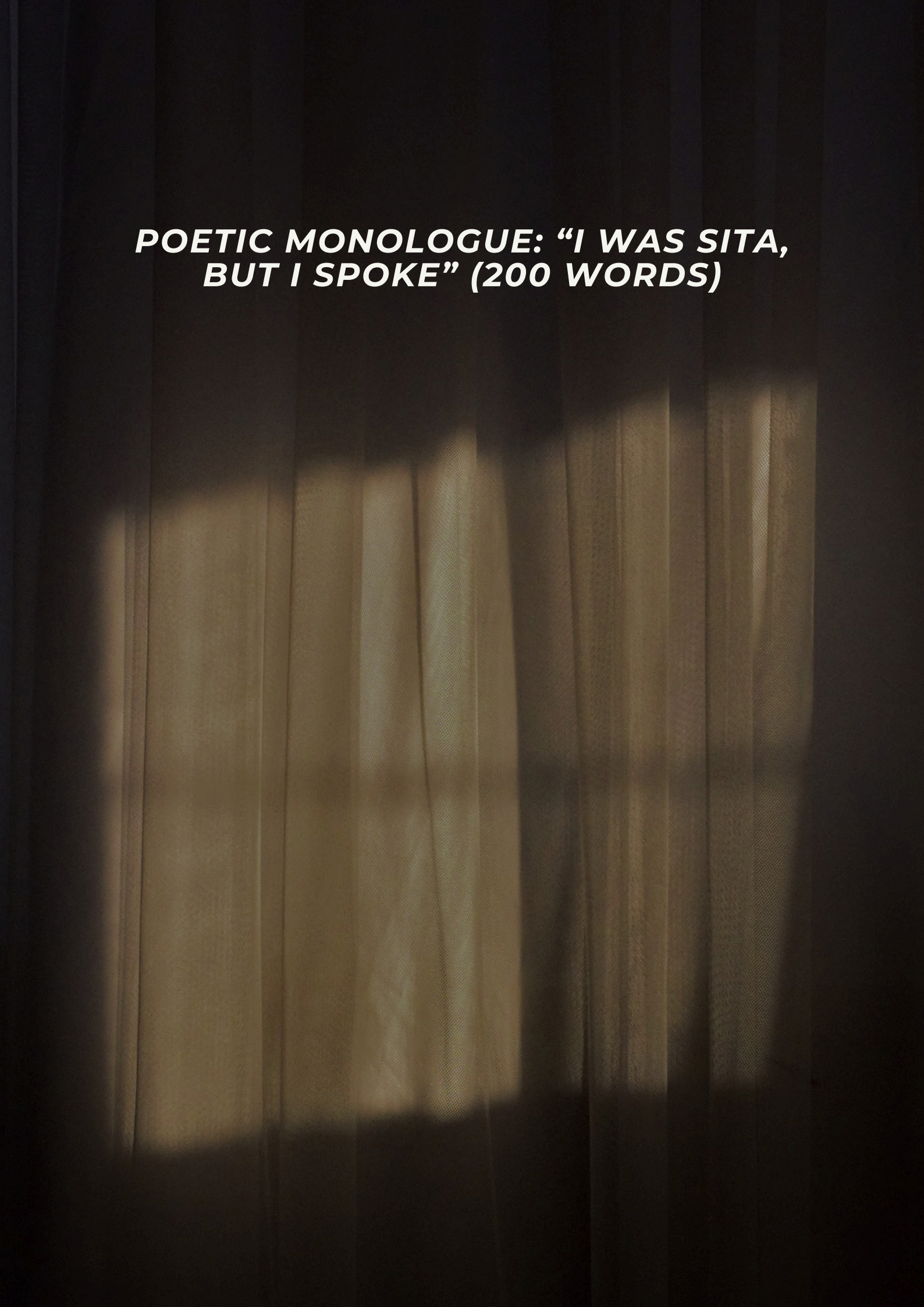
Back home, Meera braced for punishment. But her mother, eyes wet, held her tightly.

"Dadi would've been proud," she whispered.

That night, the wedding was called off.

Not because of anger. But because the village had heard Sita speak — and they couldn't un-hear her.

POETIC MONOLOGUE: “I WAS SITA, BUT I SPOKE” (200 WORDS)



“I Was Sita, But I Spoke”

I was born in a story written by silence,
In pages where girls don’t shout — only endure.
They called me Sita, wrapped me in sacrifice,
But never let me speak in my own cure.
I was taught how to walk with downcast eyes,
How to fold pain like linen in a trunk.
To bear, to bloom, and never break —
Even as my spirit silently sunk.
But one day I wore fire like a crown,
And I said — No more. I will not bow.
I am not just a name in some holy verse,
I am a girl. And I am here. I am now.
You told me love meant proving worth,
But I was born worthy — why must I bleed?
If Ram could question Sita’s soul,
Then Sita could rise and plant a seed.
So I rewrote the tale with trembling hand,
In ink drawn from my burning throat.
Not to erase what came before —
But to remind the world that Sita spoke.
And every girl who hears this flame,
Will light her own and break the yoke.
Because silence is not in our stars —
We are thunder. We are smoke.

CHAPTER 5: “THE WINDOW IN THE WALL”

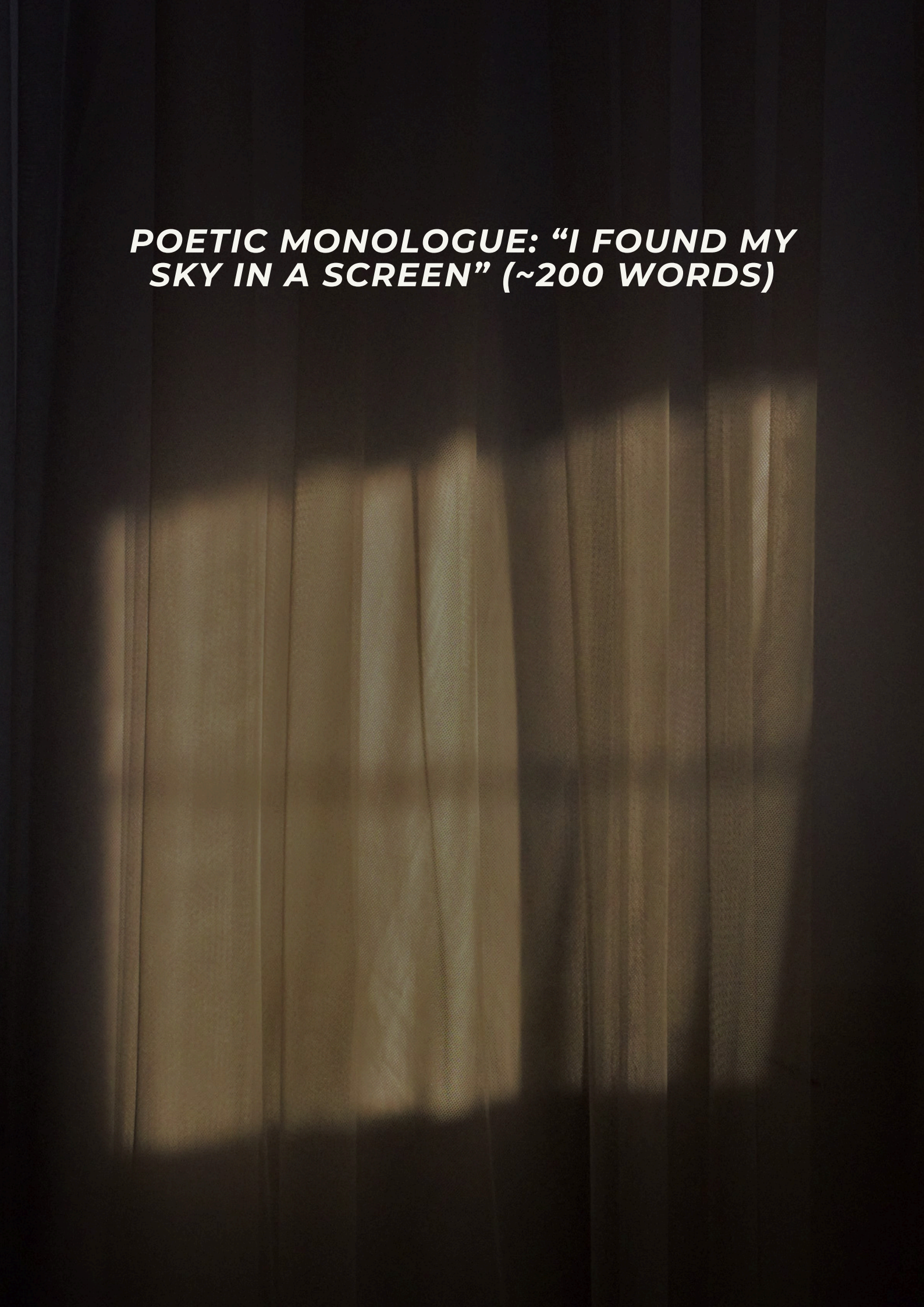
- THEME / FOCUS: GIRLS' RIGHT TO EDUCATION & DIGITAL DIVIDE
- WORD COUNT (STORY): ~1500 WORDS
- STYLE: EMOTIONAL REALIST STORYTELLING WITH POETIC SYMBOLISM
- ENDING POETIC MONOLOGUE: “I FOUND MY SKY IN A SCREEN” (~200 WORDS)

In a slum near Patna, twelve-year-old Ruksar lived in a one-room home made of broken bricks, patched tarpaulin, and dreams half-forgotten.
She had never seen the inside of a school. Each morning, she helped her mother cook for a contractor’s family nearby. At night, she stitched bindis onto sari borders, earning five rupees a strip. But something burned brighter than the kerosene lamp she studied by — curiosity.
One summer afternoon, while delivering food, she stood outside the contractor’s house and peeked through a broken window. Inside, his daughter attended online classes on a tablet — geography, grammar, galaxies…
Ruksar was mesmerized. She began coming earlier, just to listen.
For weeks, that broken window became her classroom.
She whispered answers before the girl could. She learned multiplication while carrying buckets. She memorized poems while sweeping floors.

But one day, the contractor caught her.
“What are you doing here?” he barked.
Ruksar flinched but stood her ground.
“Sir, I was listening. I want to study too. Just for ten minutes daily. Please.”
He scoffed. “Go sweep the stairs.”
But his daughter, Ananya, stepped forward.
“Papa, if she wants to learn, let her sit with me.”
Silence.
Then — to everyone’s surprise — he nodded.
The next morning, Ruksar sat beside Ananya in the drawing room. Not as a maid, but a student.
An old cracked tablet was found from a drawer. “Use it till it works,” the contractor said gruffly.
In three months, Ruksar finished two years of syllabus.
In six months, she was topping mock tests. Her parents, illiterate and unsure, looked at her as if she was made of miracles.

One NGO volunteer who visited the neighborhood noticed her and got her enrolled in a bridge school. Ruksar walked barefoot to class, holding the tablet like it was a ticket to the moon.
She later told a journalist,
“I first saw the world through a window in a wall.
Now, I want to break walls for other girls too.”

POETIC MONOLOGUE: “I FOUND MY SKY IN A SCREEN” (~200 WORDS)



“I Found My Sky in a Screen”

They said the screen was not mine to touch,
That some minds are born only to dust and dishes.
But even stars need dark skies to shine —
And I was born beneath both wounds and wishes.
My fingers learned alphabets from shadows,
While mops and menus shaped my days.
Yet behind a cracked window and half a dream,
I found light in digital rays.
They told me my ceiling was brick and tin,
That knowledge lived in homes with marble floors.
But I, a barefoot girl with stitched-up hopes,
Built a ladder from forgotten doors.
Each pixel, a planet. Each page, a flight.
I held the tablet like a bird with wings.
And though the signal was sometimes weak,
My will, my hunger — fierce as kings.
You see a gadget. I see a galaxy.
A girl rising from zero to queen.
Not every revolution wears banners —
Some begin quietly behind a screen.
So when you lock learning behind passwords and gates,
Remember the girls who watch through cracks.
We don’t beg for knowledge. We claim it,
With chalk, with courage, with blistered backs.
I found my sky in a screen.
Now I will teach others to dream.

CHAPTER 6: “THE ANKLET SELLER’S DAUGHTER”

- THEME / FOCUS: CHILD MARRIAGE, GIRL EMPOWERMENT, RURAL RESISTANCE
- WORD COUNT (STORY): ~1500 WORDS
- STYLE: CULTURAL, EMOTIONAL STORYTELLING WITH SYMBOLIC OBJECTS (ANKLETS)
- ENDING POETIC MONOLOGUE: “THE BELL THAT DIDN’T BREAK” (~200 WORDS)

In the heart of rural Rajasthan, in a village where women spoke with lowered eyes and young girls became brides before they knew their own names, lived a girl named Meera. She was fourteen. Her father sold anklets in the village market — heavy, silver, and hollow-sounding, like so many traditions tied to feet too young to carry them.

Meera loved running barefoot across the mustard fields, scribbling poems on clay with sticks. She dreamed of being a teacher — not of Math or English, but of choices.

But dreams in her village were considered dangerous.

One evening, while playing by the well, she overheard her parents talking:

“The match is final. The boy’s family wants her in a month.”

“She’s only fourteen…”

“Girls her age are already mothers. Why delay?”

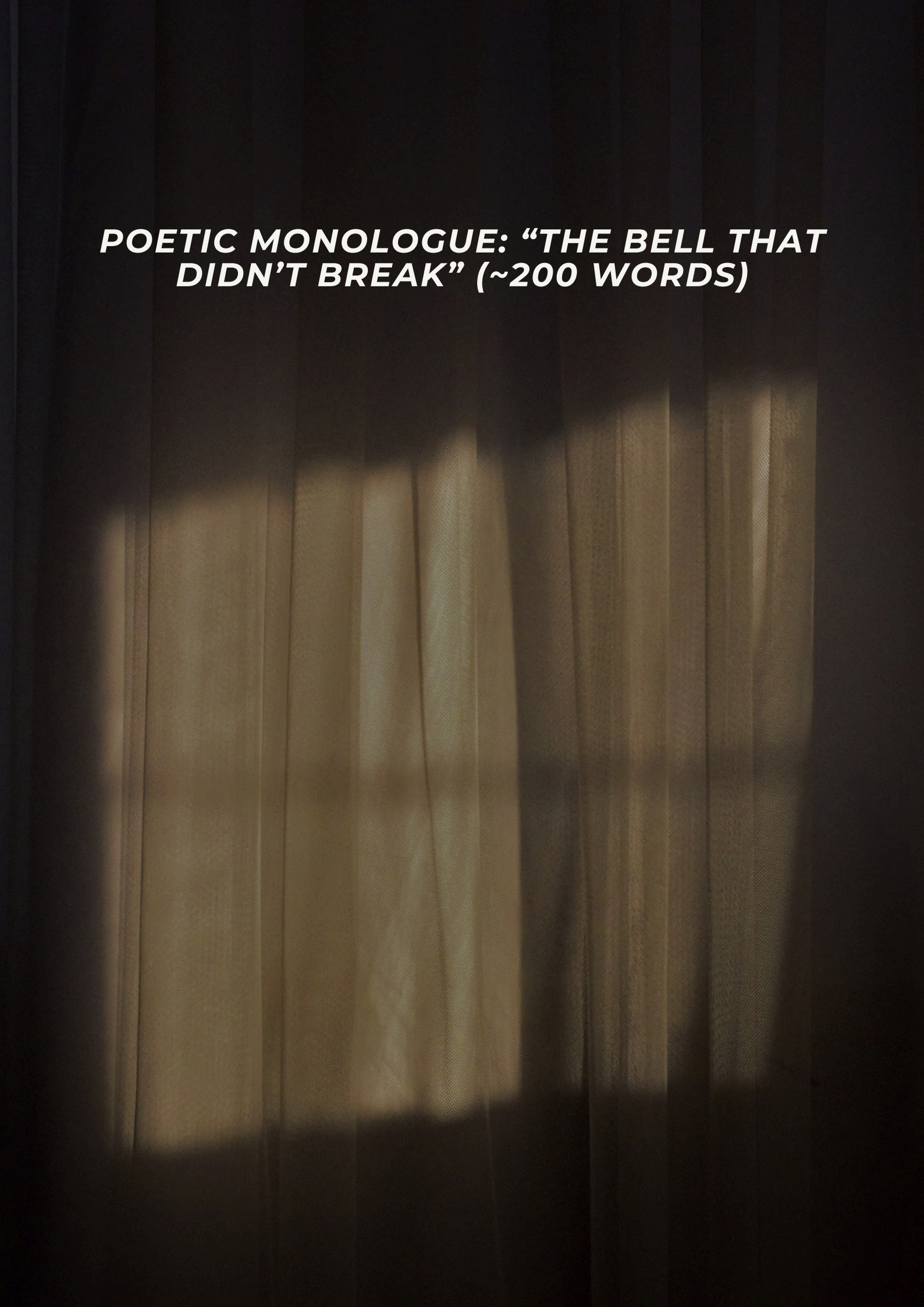
Her stomach turned. She ran to her favorite neem tree and cried.

That night, she didn’t sleep.

At dawn, Meera made a decision.
She went to school — a one-room structure three kilometers away — and told her teacher everything.
The teacher, a young woman named Ms. Ritu, listened, then hugged her tight.
"Meera, you are not alone. We'll stop this. But it has to come from you, loud and clear."
They called a village meeting under the banyan tree.
Meera, dressed in her red ghagra, stood before the crowd. Her voice trembled, but her eyes didn't.
"You sell anklets, Baba. They're beautiful.
But I'm not ready to wear them as a bride.
Let me wear them as a student, as a girl who runs — not a girl who's stopped."
The elders murmured. Some laughed. But one voice rose: her grandmother's.
"She's right. I was married at 13. I didn't even know what marriage meant. Let the girl be."
Then Ms. Ritu stepped forward and quoted the law:
"Child marriage is illegal. And more than that — it's unfair. If we don't listen to Meera today, we'll lose another life in silence."
There was silence.
Then Baba spoke, his voice rough:
"Fine. Let her study. Let her run barefoot for now. But no more crying at wells."

Months passed.
Meera topped the district exams. She began writing short stories and even taught girls from nearby hamlets about health, safety, and their rights.
Her anklets now sang when she walked — not because she was being led away, but because she was leading others.
Years later, her father's shop still sold anklets.
But now, behind the counter was a sign:
"Let every bell ring in freedom, not fear."

POETIC MONOLOGUE: “THE BELL THAT DIDN’T BREAK” (~200 WORDS)



From Hands to Heaven, Descends Boundless Mercy

They tied me with silver,
Not knowing I was fire.
They named me wife before woman,
But I was born to climb higher.
They placed anklets on my feet —
Symbols of beauty, and chains in disguise.
But I learned to run with rhythm,
Turning shame into rise.
My steps were poems. My silence, storms.
Each “no” I spoke echoed down hills.
They wanted a girl who obeyed and disappeared,
But I gave them ink, books, and wills.
I stood in front of men with white mustaches,
And women with broken pasts in their eyes.
I told them: “I am not your past.
I am the daughter of sunrise.”
I wasn’t brave alone.
My strength was woven from grandmothers’ regrets,
From teachers who whispered,
“You are more than what your village expects.”
The anklets still chime.
But not to bind — to remind.
That some girls don’t run away —
They rise, and then turn to find
Other girls in the shadows,
Waiting to be seen, to be free.
And when we all run together,
That’s when the world will truly see
That anklets can echo not just marriage songs,
But the march of rebellion, soft and strong.

CHAPTER 7: “THE BOY WHO WORE PINK”

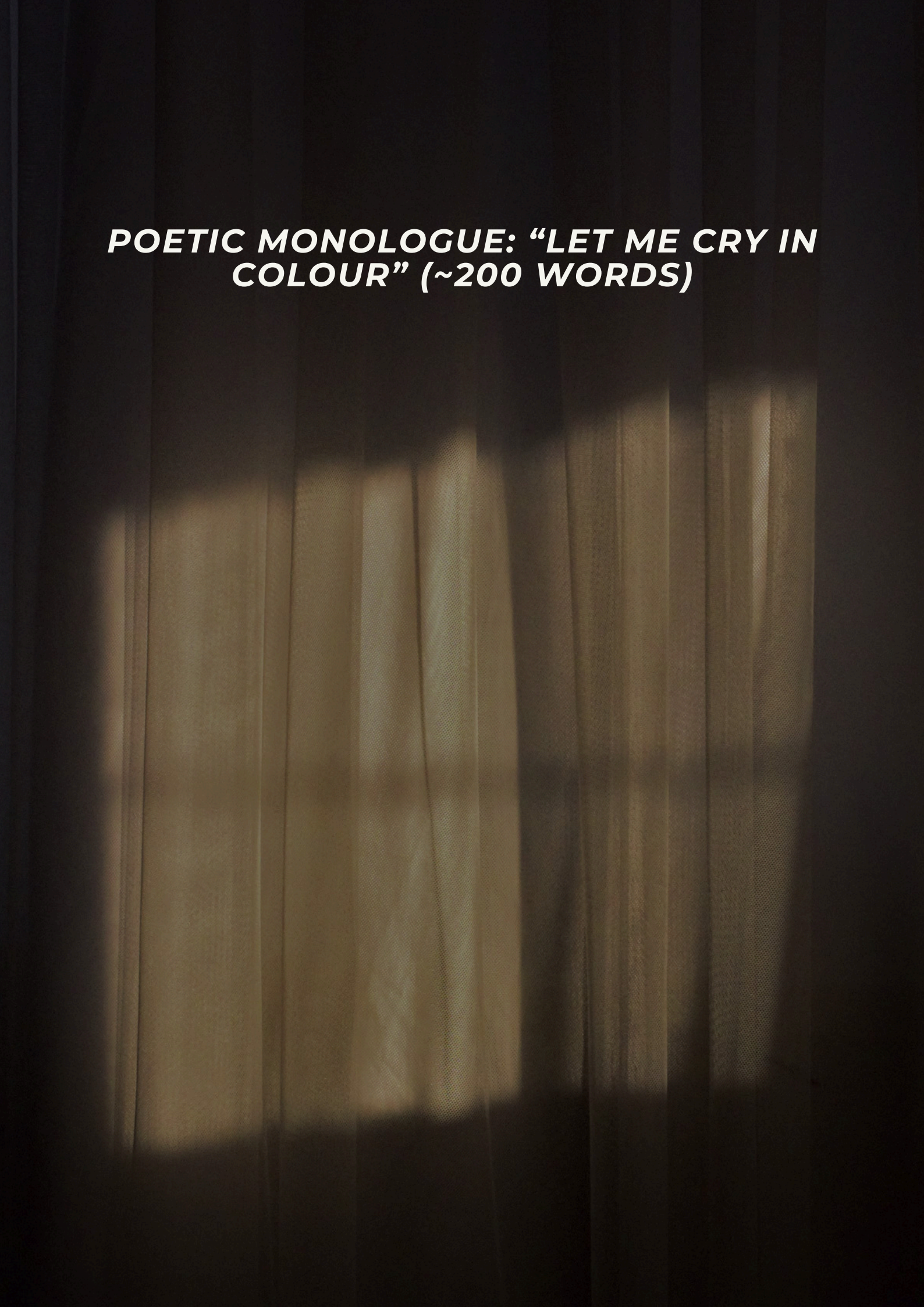
- THEME / FOCUS: GENDER STEREOTYPES, EMOTIONAL RIGHTS OF BOYS, WOMEN’S ROLE IN RAISING FEMINIST SONS
- WORD COUNT (STORY): ~1500 WORDS
- STYLE: INTIMATE, EMOTIONAL NARRATIVE WITH CULTURAL REVERSAL
- ENDING POETIC MONOLOGUE: “LET ME CRY IN COLOUR” (~200 WORDS)

In a school nestled between the golden wheat fields of Punjab, a boy named Ishaan was learning how to disappear.
He was ten. Too old to cry, too soft to fight.
His favorite color was pink, his favorite activity was helping his mother stitch sarees, and his notebooks were filled not with cricket scores but doodles of butterflies, stars, and faces of women he saw working hard all day.
But none of this was allowed in his world.
“Boys don’t wear pink.”
“Stop helping in the kitchen, are you a girl?”
“Crying? What are you, weak?”
These words came not from bullies alone. Sometimes even from Papa.
He didn’t hate his father. He just wished his father understood that wearing pink didn’t make him less of a boy. That crying wasn’t weakness. That helping Ma wasn’t shameful — it was beautiful.
One day, the school announced “Cultural Expression Day.” Students were to dress as they wished, express who they were.
Ishaan knew what he wanted.
He wore a pale pink kurta stitched by his mother. He painted a sun on one cheek, a tear on the other. His mother wept when she saw him.

“Will they laugh at you?” she asked.
“Let them,” he said. “Maybe they’ll learn something.”
In school, laughter rang through the corridors.
“Are you in the wrong costume?”
“You forgot your sister’s dress at home?”
But Ishaan didn’t flinch.
When it was his turn to speak, he walked to the mic.
“They say pink is a girl’s color.
But do you know why?
Because girls were seen as soft. As emotional.
And emotions were seen as weakness.
But I wear pink today — not because I’m weak, but because I feel.
I help my mother because she is strong.
I cry because I am human.
And if you think being kind makes me any less of a boy —
Maybe we need new boys in this world.”
Silence. Then, one clap. His teacher. Then another. Then many.
The next day, Papa didn’t speak. But that night, when Ishaan entered the kitchen, he saw his father there, chopping onions.

And he whispered, “Teach me how to sew.”
Years later, Ishaan grew up to be a counselor for boys and men, opening India's first emotional health center for rural boys.
He wore pink at the ribbon-cutting ceremony.
Not in rebellion — in pride.

POETIC MONOLOGUE: “LET ME CRY IN COLOUR” (~200 WORDS)



“Let Me Cry In Colour”

Let me cry, not in shadows,
But in the brightest hues of dawn.
Let my tears not be hidden
Behind the curtain of “be strong.”
Why must manhood be carved
From silence, fists, and shame?
Why can’t it be painted
With love, laughter, and name?
They told me pink was forbidden,
As if color had a gender.
But I wore it like courage —
Not loud, but tender.
I stitched the world in threads
That held more than seams.
I built with kindness,
With tears that dreamed.
My voice didn’t break —
It bloomed.
My hands didn’t hit —
They healed.
And now when boys cry,
I don’t hush them.
I hand them color.
A shade of self they never revealed.
This is my pink —
Not for softness alone.
But for power that doesn’t crush,
And strength that’s grown.
So let your sons dance.
Let them choose blue or rose.
Let them speak with their heart —
Let them feel, let them glow.
Because manhood is not in hiding.
It’s in being whole.
And a world that lets boys cry
Is a world that is finally whole.

CHAPTER 8: “RED IS NOT SHAME”

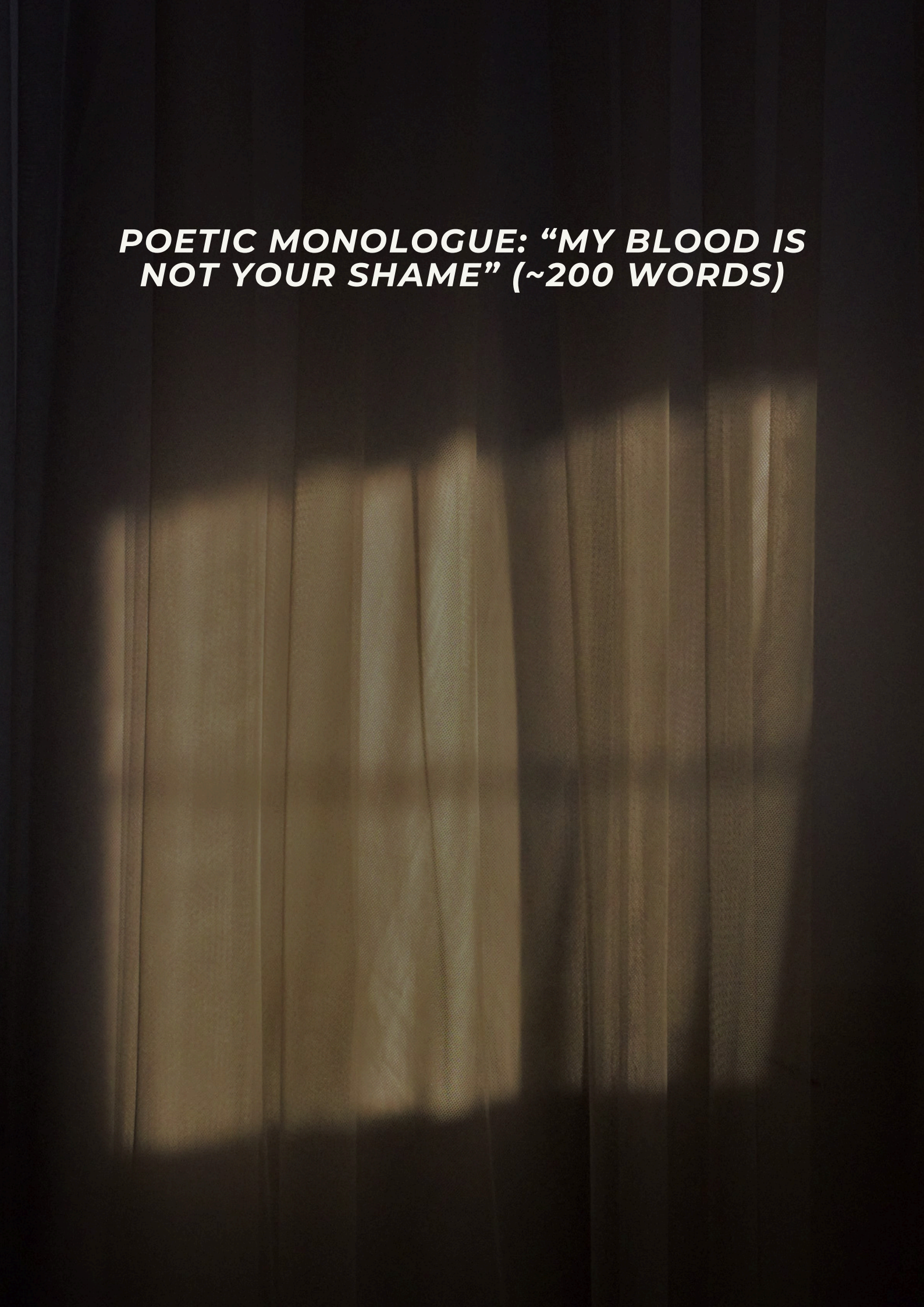
- THEME / FOCUS: MENSTRUAL RIGHTS, PERIOD STIGMA, ACCESS TO HYGIENE, GIRL EMPOWERMENT
- WORD COUNT (STORY): ~1500 WORDS
- STYLE: BOLD, EMOTIONAL NARRATIVE WITH CULTURAL AND RURAL REALISM
- ENDING POETIC MONOLOGUE: “MY BLOOD IS NOT YOUR SHAME” (~200 WORDS)

Her name was Champa, but she was never allowed to bloom.
She lived in a tribal village tucked beneath the forest belt of Jharkhand — where girls disappeared from school at thirteen, where menstruation was a secret that crawled in silence, wrapped in old cloths and older fears.
Champa was twelve when the blood first came. No warning. No whisper. Just a stain on her skirt during prayer. A circle of red. A circle of shame.
She ran from the assembly ground, chased by laughter.
Her mother slapped her. “Why did you not check? You’re a woman now.”
Champa didn’t understand what being a woman meant. All she knew was that school was over. The monthly exile had begun.
In their village, when the blood came, girls were sent to the “Chaupadi room” — a dark, mud hut with no windows, where they sat for 5 days. No touch. No prayers. No education. Not even clean cloth, let alone sanitary pads.
She bled alone. And cried even more.

One day, a new teacher came — Shalini Didi. A city girl with a red shawl and louder dreams. She noticed Champa's absence. Asked questions. Got silence.
Until she knocked on the Chaupadi hut.
"Who's in there?"
"Champa," a whisper came.
"I've brought you something," she said. And slipped through the door… a packet of pads and a storybook titled The Science of Red.
Champa stared. "Why are you here? You'll become unclean."
Shalini Didi smiled, "I bleed too. And I'm not unclean. You are not unclean."
That day changed everything.
Over months, Shalini Didi taught the girls. About their bodies. Their rights. About hygiene. Biology. Power.
Champa became her voice. She convinced her mother to attend a village meeting.
She stood before fifty men and said —
"I bleed. Not in shame. But in strength. I want to go to school, even on Day 1, Day 2, Day 3. If boys can run in shorts, why can't I walk with a pad?"

The old priest frowned. But one woman clapped. Then another. Then her mother. Eventually, the Chaupadi hut was demolished. A menstrual room with hygiene kits was built instead.
Champa stayed in school. And 4 years later, founded “Laal Deep”— a menstrual literacy program that lit over 200 villages with clean pads and cleaner minds.

POETIC MONOLOGUE: “MY BLOOD IS NOT YOUR SHAME” (~200 WORDS)



“My Blood Is Not Your Shame”

My blood is not your silence,
Not a sin to hide or name.
It is the rhythm of rivers,
Not a symbol of shame.
You built me huts of exile,
Mud rooms of fear and mold.
But didn’t you know this blood
Is the iron of warriors bold?
I don’t leak disgrace —
I leak life.
I don’t carry curse —
I carry light.
Don’t turn your face away
When I bleed.
Turn your heart
And plant a seed.
A seed of knowledge,
A pad of pride,
A chapter in textbooks
You can no longer hide.
You taught me fear
But I write freedom
With every red drop
That stains your kingdom.
I am not dirty.
I am divine.
The blood in me
Is the fire in time.
So let your daughters bleed.
Let them play, let them run.
Don’t bind them in cloths
When they rise like the sun.
Because shame is not in the blood —
It’s in the silence you allow.
Break it. Burn it.
Bleed with dignity now.

CHAPTER 9: “CANVAS OF THE PAVEMENT”

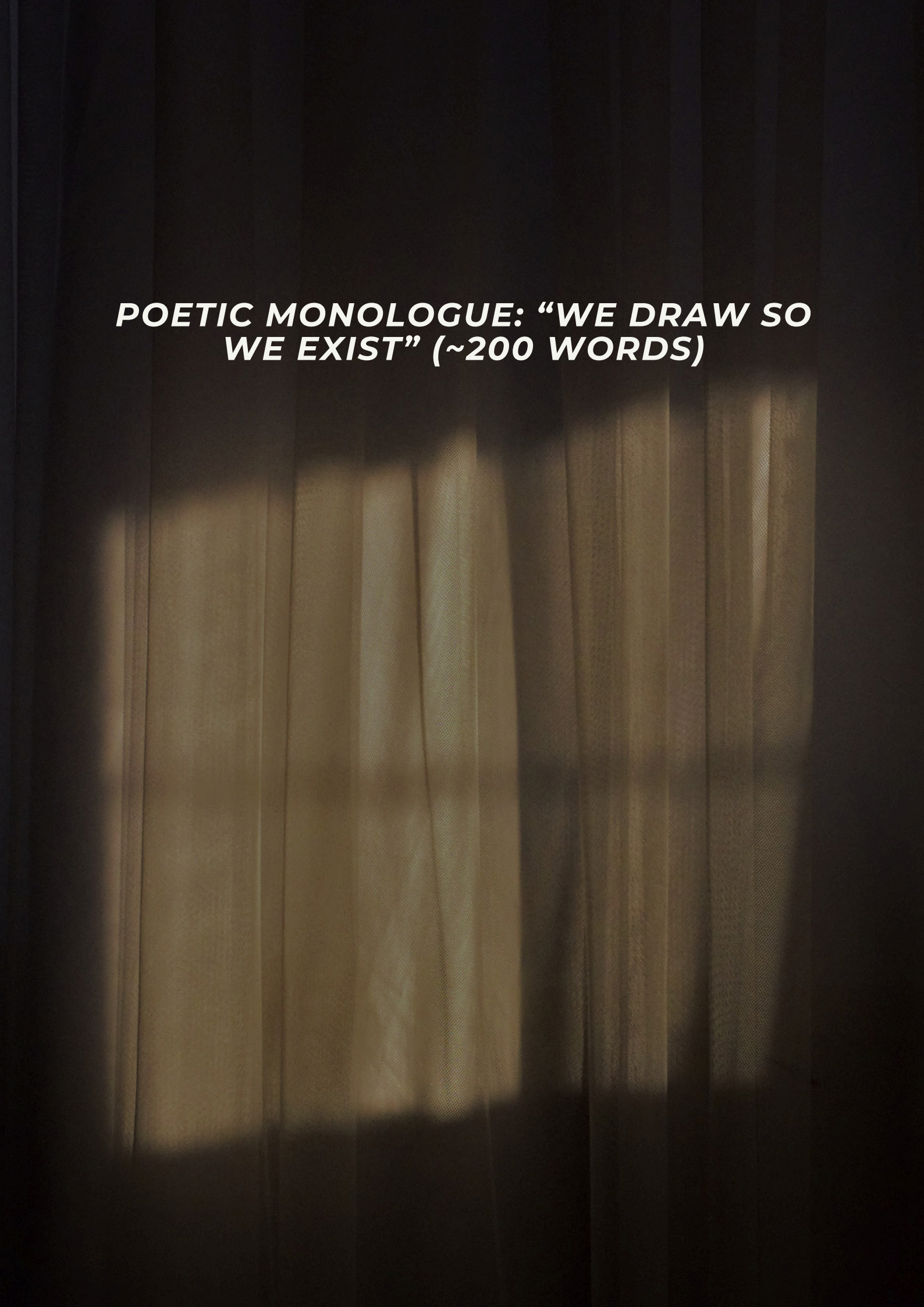
- THEME / FOCUS: STREET CHILDREN, RIGHT TO IDENTITY, CHILD ART AS A TOOL FOR EXPRESSION AND REFORM
- WORD COUNT (STORY): ~1500 WORDS
- STYLE: REALIST-EMOTIONAL NARRATIVE WITH VISUAL METAPHORS AND GRIT
- ENDING POETIC MONOLOGUE: “WE DRAW SO WE EXIST” (~200 WORDS)

The pavement was his home, his school, and his world.
Rafiq, 10 years old, born beneath the flyover in Delhi, had never owned a birth certificate — but he did own a broken paintbrush and the sky above him. He slept on a plastic sheet with his younger sister, Amina, beside a busy intersection where people walked faster than dreams could catch them.
He had no toys — only chalk pieces he found near construction sites. Every morning, before the hawkers arrived, Rafiq would draw.
Not cartoons.
But portraits.
Faces.
Eyes that told stories.
Stories no one wanted to hear.
On a cracked wall beside a public urinal, he had once painted a mother crying with her child curled inside her arms. Above it, he had written in red:
"Is hunger a crime?"
People began to stop.
Some dropped coins. Some took pictures. One day, a man in a tie came. He called it “urban graffiti.” Then he left.

But someone else came too.
Pavitra Ma’am, an art therapist working with an NGO called Rang ke Haq. She saw the wall, waited for Rafiq, and offered him a chance to paint on canvas — real canvas — not broken concrete.
"Why?" he asked. "I’m just a street kid."
She smiled, “No, you’re a street artist. You speak with colours no one else dares to use.”
Through her help, Rafiq entered a children’s art exhibition.
His painting — "Pavement Dreams" — showed his sister brushing her teeth with ash, a policeman shooing them away, and a paper crown on his own head made of newspaper headlines. The title card read: “We exist. You just don’t look.”
He didn’t win a prize.
But a journalist wrote about him.
Then a collector from Kolkata offered to buy his painting for ₹15,000.
He refused.
“I don’t want to sell it. I want to hang it in the Parliament, so ministers can see who sleeps on their footpaths.”
Soon, other street children joined his project. They began a mobile gallery — painting on cardboard, hoardings, even broken buckets. They called themselves “Bachpan ki Kalam” — a collective of art by nameless children.

With Pavitra Ma’am's help, they got access to identity papers, Aadhaar cards, and even night classes. Some went back to school.
Rafiq never left the street.
But he made the world stop at his art.
Because now, the pavement was no longer just cement —
It was a canvas of protest, of dreams, and of a childhood painted back into existence.

POETIC MONOLOGUE: “WE DRAW SO WE EXIST” (~200 WORDS)



“We Draw So We Exist”

We do not have school bells —
But we have sirens.
We do not hold crayons —
But we hold rusted iron.
We are the children of no land,
No postal code, no gate.
But we draw with broken chalks
And write our stolen fate.
We don’t beg for coins —
We beg for eyes.
To look.
To pause.
To recognize.
Each line we sketch
Is a scream unsaid.
Each colour we pour
Is the tear we bled.
They say we are “nuisance,”
That we crowd the light.
But tell me, have you ever
Drawn dreams through the night?
We don’t want sympathy.
We want brush and board.
We want our hunger
To be seen and stored.
So let us paint the pavements.
Let us colour your sleep.
Let the gallery of streetlights
Show the secrets we keep.
We draw not for fame.
We draw so we exist.
We draw because
Childhood should not be missed.

CHAPTER 10: “THE SWORD IN HER SHADOW”

- THEME / FOCUS: GIRLS’ RIGHT TO SELF-DEFENSE, PSYCHOLOGICAL EMPOWERMENT, AND BREAKING GENERATIONAL TRAUMA
- WORD COUNT (STORY): ~1500 WORDS
- STYLE: DEEP NARRATIVE REALISM + CULTURAL SYMBOLISM (MYTHOLOGY & MARTIAL METAPHOR)
- ENDING POETIC MONOLOGUE: “I AM MY OWN SWORD” (~200 WORDS)

The lanes of Banswara, Rajasthan, curled like secrets. In one of them lived Chandrika, a 13-year-old girl with skin the color of sunburnt earth, and eyes that never blinked in fear — not anymore.

Because fear had once lived inside her house. Her father, once a farmer, now an alcoholic, ruled the house with silence and fists. Her mother, Rami, once radiant, now flinched at door slams. Every evening, Chandrika would return from school, sit cross-legged beside her younger brother, and pretend homework could drown screams.

But something changed the day her school brought in Sensei Tara — a self-defense instructor who spoke like thunder and moved like lightning. She had scars — not hidden. A woman with cropped hair and a cracked wristwatch, she didn’t ask girls to “avoid danger.” She taught them to meet it.

Chandrika hesitated at first.

“But what can a girl do?” she had whispered.

Sensei Tara bent low and replied, “A girl is Durga with braided hair. She only needs to remember her sword.”

That day, Chandrika hit a punching pad for the first time.

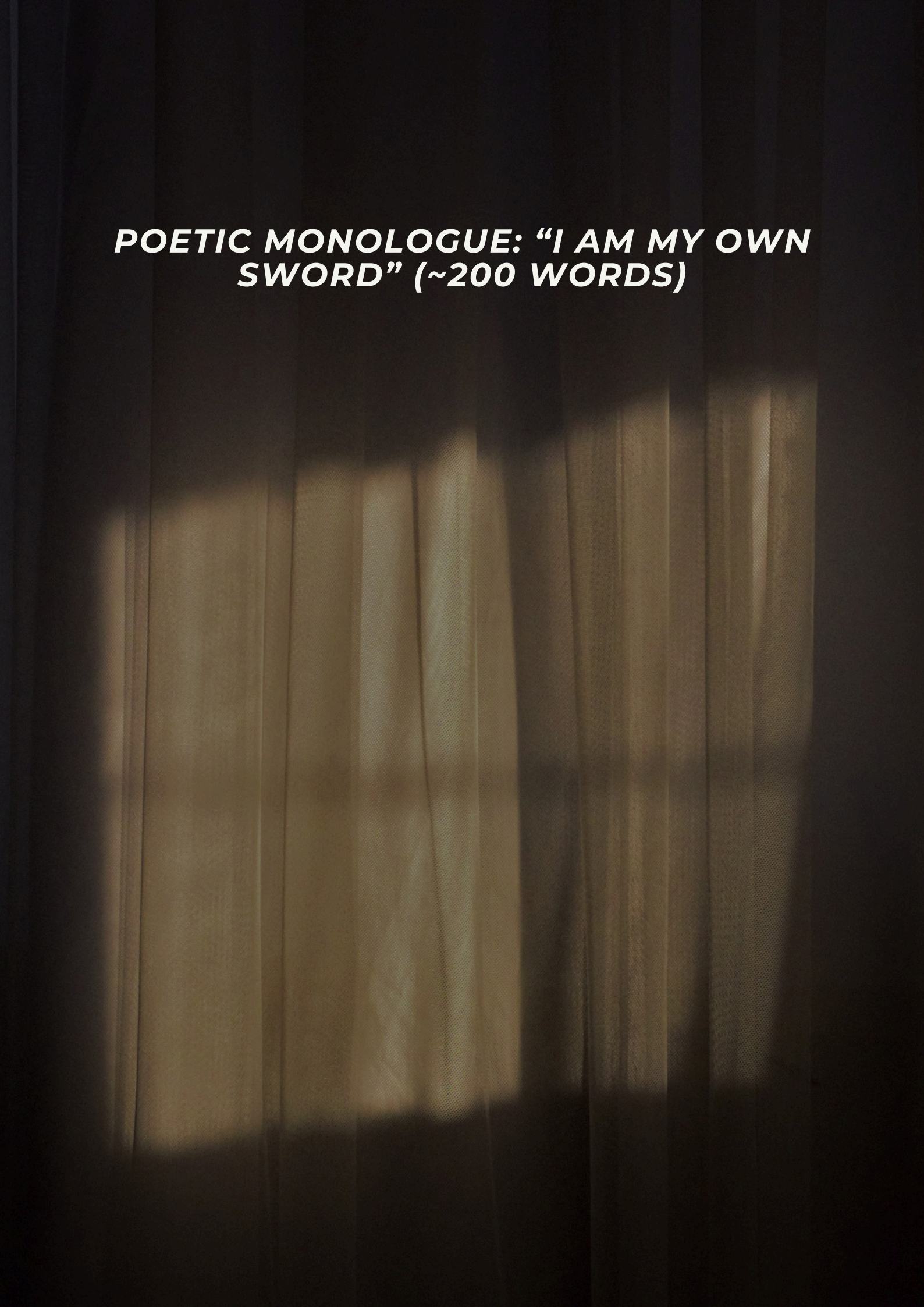
Her knuckles hurt.

But her silence cracked.

Within weeks, she trained daily — breathing deeper, walking taller. One afternoon, on her way home, two older boys tried to block her near the dried well. She didn't cry.
She stepped forward.
Feet apart.
Hands ready.
Voice loud.
"Move, or regret."
They laughed.
She didn't.
The next morning, they didn't return to that alley. And a new whisper passed among the girls:
"Chandrika fought back."
That night, her father returned drunk again — hurling a plate across the wall. Her mother froze. But Chandrika stood between them, shoulders squared.
"Touch her again," she said quietly, "and I will call the Mahila Police."
The man froze.
The girl didn't blink.
He didn't raise a hand that night.

Chandrika went on to teach 42 other girls basic defense — on rooftops, in schoolyards, under mango trees. They called themselves "Nirbhaya Sena." No boy dared mock their uniforms again.
Her mother began teaching stitching classes. Her home, once filled with bruises, now echoed with boldness.
And as for Chandrika?
She grew up not to fear shadows —
but to become the sword within them.

POETIC MONOLOGUE: “I AM MY OWN SWORD” (~200 WORDS)



“I Am My Own Sword”

I am the girl you taught to bow,
To hush, to kneel, to bend.
But listen now —
I do not break. I transcend.
You silenced my cries
With fear and force.
But I found my voice
On a martial course.
My wrists no longer tremble —
They strike.
My gaze no longer flees —
It spikes.
I was told to “stay safe,”
To “avoid,” to “pray.”
But my feet now march
A warrior’s way.
I am not steel
From some distant forge.
I am the flame
Of every scorched gorge.
This braid is my banner.
This bruise is my badge.
This breath is my battle.
This step, my edge.
To every girl living in fear,
Hear this vow I wield:
You are not a victim —
You are your own shield.
Let the world expect silence,
Expect shame, expect cord —
We are the storm.
We are the sword.

CHAPTER 11: “GULAB AND THE RUSTY TYPEWRITER”

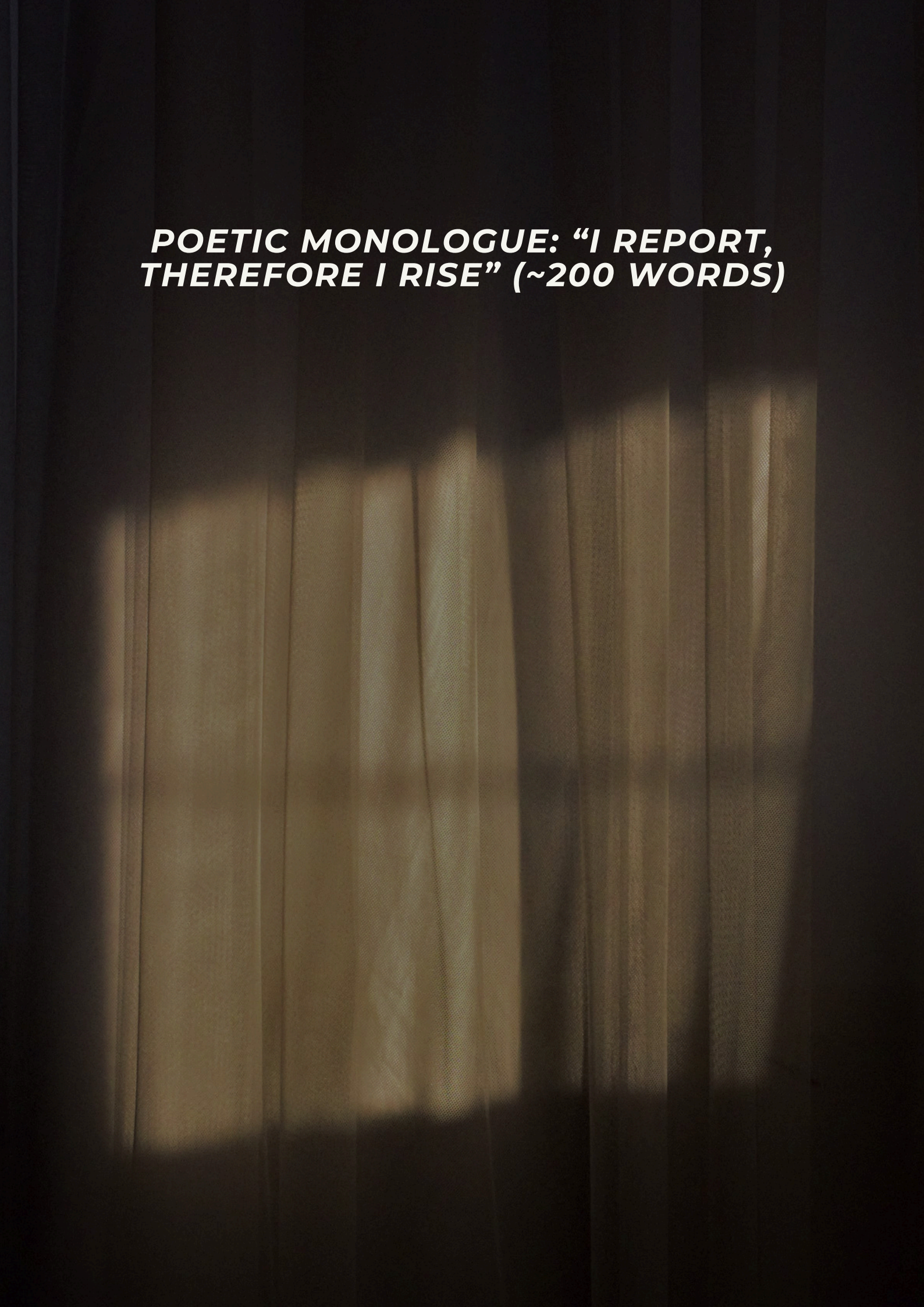
- THEME / FOCUS: CHILDREN AS WATCHDOGS OF DEMOCRACY; RIGHT TO EXPRESSION; RURAL GIRLS IN JOURNALISM
- WORD COUNT (STORY): ~1500 WORDS
- STYLE: REALISTIC FICTION + JOURNALISTIC IMAGERY
- ENDING POETIC MONOLOGUE: “I REPORT, THEREFORE I RISE” (~200 WORDS)

In the dusty heartland of Bundelkhand, where the earth cracked before the truth did, lived a 14-year-old girl with ink-stained fingers and fire in her lungs.
Her name was Gulab.
No, not after the flower — but after the thorns, her grandmother insisted.
“She pricks the lies and draws blood.”
Every morning, while other girls collected water, Gulab clutched her rusty Remington typewriter, gifted by a retired teacher who saw her scribbling news on torn schoolbooks.
Her father had said, “No girl in this village needs a machine louder than her bangles.”
She didn’t answer.
She wrote an article about teachers absent for 43 days in the government school.
She posted it on the tehsil wall.
Within a week, two teachers were transferred.
Gulab was called a witch, a troublemaker.
But also: a journalist.
Her next piece was bolder.
The anganwadi center that served rotten rice.
She ate it herself, vomited, then wrote the headline:

“If It’s Good for Children, Let the Officials Eat It First.”
The collector called her “too young to know things.”
Gulab replied, “I’m young enough to suffer them.”
Her name reached local radio. Then Delhi.
One evening, a group of men set fire to her mud hut — warning her family to keep her silent.
She emerged from the smoke, coughing, carrying only one thing:
The typewriter.
“It’s not just a machine,” she whispered to the crowd.
“It’s my truth cannon.”
The next day, she published:
“They Burned My House, But Not My Voice.”
Soon, other girls joined her. They called themselves the “Barefoot Pen Club” — writing about missing toilets, dowry deaths, and bribes. Local newspapers began reprinting them. People listened. Officials feared.
Gulab never wore makeup.
She wore ink.
She never raised her volume.

She raised her words.
And slowly, from the cracks of forgotten villages,
rose a revolution of voices.

POETIC MONOLOGUE: “I REPORT, THEREFORE I RISE” (~200 WORDS)



“I Report, Therefore I Rise”

They said,
“Girls should speak less, smile more.”
But I learned —
To speak loudest through truth’s door.
I do not hold a sword or gun,
But a typewriter older than the sun.
It creaks like a dying tree,
Yet births storms across the banyan sea.
Each clack is a cry.
Each space, a pause of pain.
Each line I write
Breaks silence like rain.
I report the rice that smells of rust.
The school that bleeds from bureaucrats’ dust.
I report the girl forced to wed.
I report the lie dressed in bread.
They burned my home — but not my pen.
They threatened once — and I wrote again.
They laughed at a girl with nothing but keys.
Now those same men sign reports on their knees.
To the world, I am small.
To the truth, I am tall.
Ink is my shield.
Justice, my prize.
I report —
Therefore I rise.

CHAPTER 12: “WIDOWS OF THE WIND”

- THEME / FOCUS: INTERGENERATIONAL HEALING — ABANDONED ORPHAN GIRLS AND ELDERLY WIDOWED WOMEN BUILDING A SHELTER TOGETHER
- WORD COUNT (STORY): ~1500 WORDS
- STYLE: MAGICAL REALISM WITH EMOTIONAL REALISM
- ENDING POETIC MONOLOGUE: “WE WHO WERE LEFT BEHIND” (~200 WORDS)

The monsoon hadn’t touched the village of Bansipur in three years — neither had the gods, it seemed.

At its edge stood a crumbling haveli, haunted not by ghosts but by memories. In its corners sat forgotten widows, white saris clinging like cobwebs to their hollow frames. Their families had moved to cities, their sons sent money, but never came back.

And then came the orphans.

Five girls, aged 7 to 14, escaping a defunct shelter that fed them more slaps than meals. They wandered for two days before finding the haveli, drawn by a wind that seemed to whisper their names.

The widows stared at them. The girls stared back.

Neither knew what to do with the other.

But both were tired of being forgotten.

The youngest girl, Koyal, climbed a neem tree and declared, “Let’s stay here.”

One widow laughed — a sound so dry it cracked.

“What will you eat, child? Dust?”

“Memories,” Koyal said. “We all have too many anyway.”

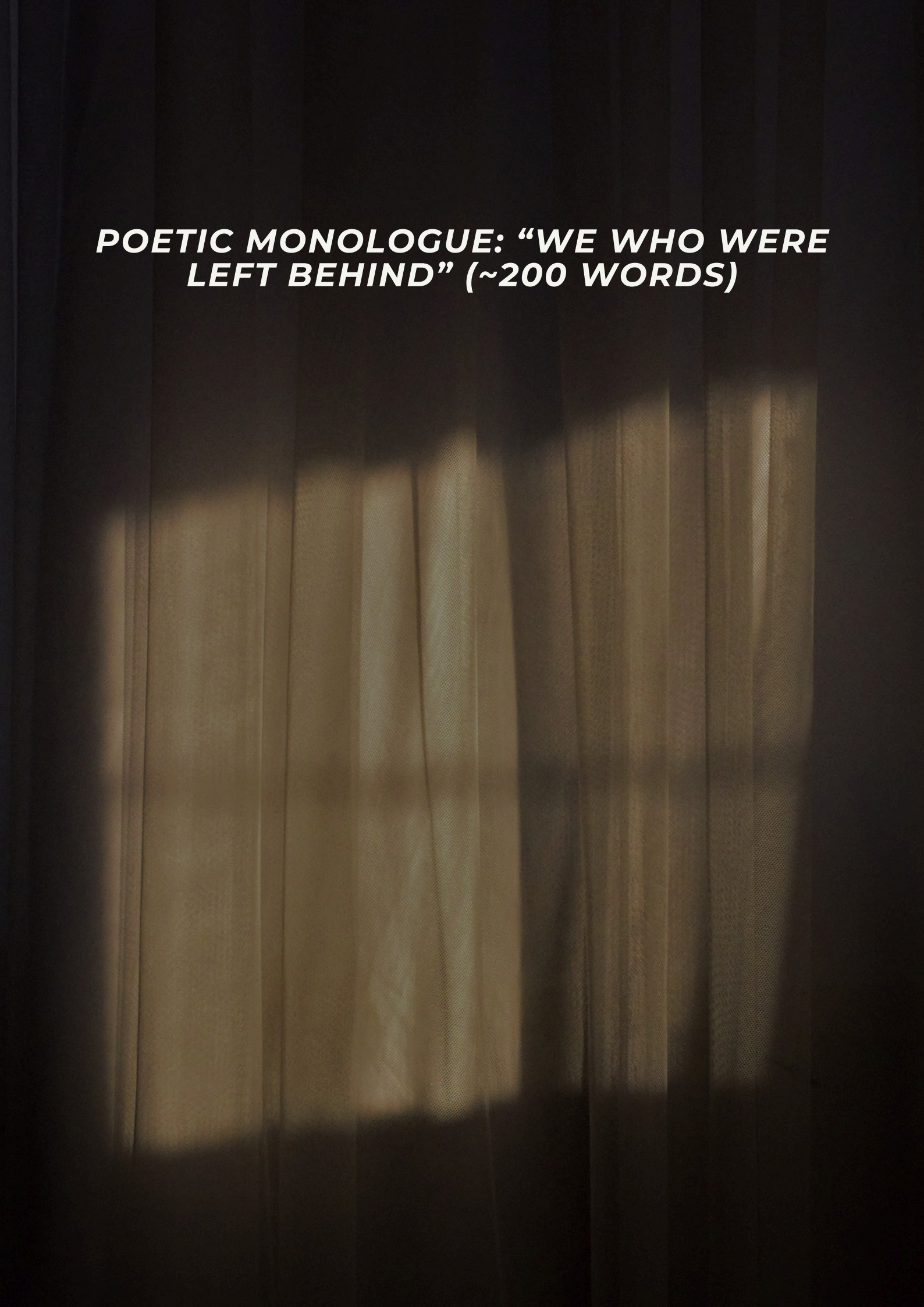
That night, for the first time in years, the widows cooked.

That night, for the first time in years, the girls slept without fear.

Days passed. The girls cleaned the haveli, mended clothes, and painted murals of flying birds.
The widows taught them stories, embroidery, how to read the Gita and repair broken bangles. Koyal made a rule: “No crying alone.”
When one widow, Champa Dadi, fell ill, the girls begged the doctor on his bike to stop.
“She’s not our grandmother,” one admitted, “but she’s ours.”
The doctor wept that night.
Word of the “haveli of left-behinds” spread.
No one called it a shelter.
It was called a sanctuary.
The panchayat tried to evict them once.
Koyal gave them a letter — written with help from Champa Dadi.
It ended with:
“If laws forget us, let history remember we tried.”
They stayed.
Soon, more orphans came. More widows. More wind.
Together, they planted trees. Started a kitchen. Sewed clothes.

Wrote poems.
Lit diyas.
Woke each other up with songs.
They were never family by blood.
But they bled the same —
And healed, together.

POETIC MONOLOGUE: “WE WHO WERE LEFT BEHIND” (~200 WORDS)



“We Who Were Left Behind”

We were the shadows no one claimed,
With names too faint, and faces unnamed.
Widows in white, orphans in rags —
Winds that wandered between prayer flags.
But then we met — in a house of dust,
And fed each other, trust by trust.
No gods called us their own that day,
So we built shrines from broken clay.
A little girl taught us to sing again,
And we stitched our wounds into monsoon rain.
One taught us how to braid the night,
Another drew stars with candlelight.
Who says a family needs a name?
Or that healing always wears the same?
We shared rotis, stories, silence, pain —
And turned abandonment into gain.
Our haven has no marble gate,
But it is braver than a magistrate.
For we, who once were thrown aside,
Became a sky too vast to hide.
We are not blood, but we are bond.
Of grief, of joy, of dreaming beyond.
Call us orphans. Call us old.
But know —
We are the fire that never folds.

AFTERWORD

When I began writing these pages, I thought I was telling other people's stories.

But somewhere between the first poem and the last story, I realized I was telling our story – humanity's story – one we have been writing for centuries in both ink and blood.

The women in these pages are not only characters. They are our sisters, mothers, daughters, friends.

The children here are not faceless symbols. They are the future – a future that cannot bloom if we deny them the soil of safety, education, and love.

These words are not enough. No book is enough.

But words can become sparks. Sparks can become conversations. Conversations can become movements.

And movements can become change.

The world will tell you that injustice is too big, too complicated, too entrenched to fight.

But history has always been rewritten by those who refused to accept that answer.

And if we remember that defending the rights of women and children is not charity but justice – not a choice but a duty – then we can stand in that history together.

Let this not be the end of a reading experience, but the beginning of an awakening.

If this book moves you, do not simply close it.

Carry its voices with you, repeat their truths, and refuse to let them be forgotten.

The shadows will always try to return. But light is patient.

And we – you, me, all of us – must be its keepers.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Prem Priyank is a young writer, independent researcher, and passionate advocate for human dignity.

Hailing from Supaul, Bihar, Prem's work blends storytelling with social conscience, aiming to give voice to those often left unheard – especially women and children whose rights are denied.

His interest in literature and history is matched by his belief that stories are not just entertainment but instruments of change. Whether through short stories, poetry, or research essays, Prem seeks to illuminate truths, provoke reflection, and inspire action.

When he is not writing, Prem studies cultural history, explores social movements, and dreams of building platforms where the unheard can tell their own stories.

Shadows into Light: Stories and Poems for the Rights of Women and Children is his heartfelt contribution to the fight for justice – a reminder that even the smallest voice can echo across generations.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To every woman and child whose strength, courage, and quiet resistance inspired these pages – I owe you more than words.

Even if your names are hidden in the folds of history, your spirit lives here.

I thank the storytellers before me – the activists, poets, journalists, teachers, and survivors – who have been speaking when the world tried not to listen. Your work lit the path I walk.

To my mentors, friends, and readers who gave feedback, encouragement, and the gentle push to write bravely instead of safely – this book would not have been born without your belief.

And to every reader holding this book now – thank you.

Because change does not happen when a book is written. It happens when a reader chooses to act.